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## WILDLIFE SERVICES—WISCONSIN

### Contact Information:

*Jason Suckow, Wisconsin and Minnesota Wildlife Services State Director*

*732 Lois Drive*

*Sun Prairie, WI*

*Phone: (608) 837-2727 FAX: (608) 837-6754*

*E-mail: [jason.suckow@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:jason.suckow@aphis.usda.gov)*

*Web Site: [www.aphis.usda.gov/ws](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ws)*

## USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Wisconsin

Every day, Wisconsin residents, industries, organizations, municipalities and agencies call on Wisconsin Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting crops and livestock, human health and safety, natural resources, and property from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

The WS program in Wisconsin manages a wide variety of wildlife damage programs that affect a large number of citizens. For example, WS specialists provide assistance to farmers who experience wildlife damage to their crops; help the public find ways to resolve nuisance wildlife problems; protect people, pets and livestock from wildlife-borne diseases and protect natural resources from wildlife depredation. WS specialists capture and relocate numerous problem Black bears and work to reduce conflicts with Canada geese, deer, wolves, and beaver. WS manages a toll-free phone line to provide information, collect samples, and monitor West Nile Virus in the state. WS has an active bird damage management program assisting farmers, municipalities, and businesses dealing with overabundant bird issues. WS also protects public safety and aircraft operations from wildlife hazards at civil and military airports throughout the State.

## Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.



### Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting crops from wildlife damage and livestock from gray wolf depredation
- Resolving crop and property damage and human health and safety problems regarding nuisance and depredating Black bears
- Protecting coldwater ecosystems, forest resources, roads and bridges from beaver damage
- Protecting public safety and aircraft operations from wildlife hazards at civil and military airports
- Assisting state agencies and USDA-VS with managing CWD in both wild and captive cervids

### Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Wisconsin:

- Investigate causes of calf mortality in wolf range, with an emphasis on livestock lost to predators and develop new techniques for effective management of gray wolf depredations
- Determine effects of overabundant Double-crested cormorants on Wisconsin's fisheries and other natural resources
- Investigate Black bear utilization of agricultural crops, including movements, behavior, and damage abatement techniques
- Development of improved techniques and methods to reduce wildlife hazards to aviation
- Improve assessment, sampling, and economic methods for wildlife damage management



**Protecting Agricultural Crops**—An abundant white-tailed deer population continues to be responsible for high levels of crop damage in the state. In addition, significant crop damage is caused by Black bears, wild turkeys, and Canada geese. Under the Wisconsin Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claims Program (WDACP), WS cooperates with 47 counties and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) to provide damage abatement and appraisal assistance. WS has investigated and verified more than \$2 million in wildlife damage that occurred on approximately 687 farms in the last year. These activities have helped affected farmers to receive in excess of \$1.5 million in compensation from the state crop damage fund.

**Protecting Livestock from Damage Caused by European Starlings**—Starling damage at farms continues to be a source of concern for Wisconsin dairy farmers. High concentrations of starlings consume and contaminate livestock feed, potentially transmit diseases, and likely reduce milk production. In 2004, WS provided free, on-site, technical advice about techniques used to manage starling damage. When direct control was requested and warranted, trained and certified WS personnel applied DRC 1339 treated bait to reduce local starling populations by 75-90 percent, when weather conditions were satisfactory.

**Protecting Livestock from Gray Wolves**—WS works closely with WDNR in a collaborative effort to continue gray wolf recovery in Wisconsin. In spring 2004, roughly 400 gray wolves occurred in 109 packs throughout the northern and the central forest regions of Wisconsin. Under a cooperative agreement with WDNR, WS is responsible for investigating wolf depredations that involve livestock, human health and safety, pets, and hunting dogs. In FY 2004, WS investigated over 100 gray wolf complaints and verified that wolves depredated 28 cows/calves on 20 different farms and 5 sheep on 2 different farms in northern Wisconsin. WS implemented non-lethal techniques on 9 different farms in order to prevent depredations from occurring after livestock producers reported that wolves were harassing livestock. WS implemented direct control activities on 19 farms and captured 27 wolves. On those farms where WS implemented direct control activities only 2 farms had additional livestock depredations after direct control activities ceased. WS' ability to alleviate wolf depredation of livestock is essential to wolf recovery because it encourages public support and public tolerance for the continued recovery of the gray wolf in Wisconsin.

**Urban Human Health and Safety Issues**—Increasing populations of resident Canada geese continue to cause a variety of human-geese conflicts in urban

areas. High densities of geese in city parks, business sites, airports, and residential areas raise concerns about human health and safety. In an attempt to alleviate human-geese conflicts, WS continues an aggressive management program including egg oiling, nest removal (when possible), and lethal removal. In 2004, WS assisted 9 communities by removing 726 resident Canada geese from city parks, zoos, businesses, and lakes. Geese were provided to local food pantries and Native American tribes as an edible meat product. WS collects Canada geese from new communities/businesses for mandatory contaminant testing in order for them to qualify to participate in the food pantry program.

**Disease Issues**—As part of its strategic plan, WS is focusing on strengthening emergency preparedness and response, and managing issues related to the health of U.S. animal resources and conflicts with wildlife. WS conducts disease surveillance and emergency response for the purpose of safe-guarding American agriculture, human health and safety, and wildlife populations. WS continues to assist and cooperate with state agencies such as WDNR, WDATCP and WDHFS on Chronic Wasting Disease surveillance and management in captive deer and elk herds and in free ranging white-tailed deer by assisting in herd depopulations and tissue sample collections in addition to maintaining a toll-free help-line to facilitate sample collection and to survey and monitor the prevalence of West Nile Virus (WNV) in Wisconsin. In 2004, 118 of 240 cervids tested positive and 59 of 72 counties in Wisconsin had evidence of WNV activity.

**Double-crested cormorants**—In 2004, WS assisted the University of Wisconsin – Madison and WDNR on a graduate research project analyzing the stomach contents of double-crested cormorants collected near Green Bay, WI. The breeding population of cormorants in the Green Bay – Lake Michigan region increased 33 percent annually between 1973 and 1997. Increased cormorant numbers in the Green Bay area have raised concerns among sport and commercial fisheries about cormorant depredation on the waning yellow perch population. Research objectives in 2004 were to obtain data on the food habits and population dynamics of cormorants in the Green Bay area.

**Protecting Property**—WS also cooperates with WDNR to manage black bear damage in Wisconsin. WS routinely receives requests for assistance from the general public concerning black bears threatening human health and safety, damaging agriculture crops and property. During FY 2004, WS received 1,273 requests for assistance to resolve Black bear complaints. Sixty-five percent of the complaints were handled by providing technical assistance and 35 percent required WS to implement direct control operations, resulting in the capture and relocation of 623 bears. Also, under a cooperative service agreement with a local university, WS captured, radio-tagged and collected biological data from 35 bears as part of wildlife research project concerning black bear interactions with a newly introduced elk population in northern Wisconsin.

**Protecting Multiple Resources**—Protecting multiple natural resources through beaver damage management is a major objective for WS in Wisconsin. WS handles over 400 complaints annually involving flooding of timber or roadways. To address these problems, WS has cooperative agreements with counties and townships to provide beaver damage management for protection of road and timber resources. WS beaver and dam removal efforts for these resources are estimated to save \$1 million annually.

WS also cooperates with WDNR, U.S. Forest Service fisheries personnel and private organizations to manage beaver damage on high quality trout streams in order to protect Wisconsin's coldwater natural resources. Beaver dams have a significant negative impact on these high quality trout streams by warming water, blocking trout movement, and reducing or eliminating trout reproduction and

#### Major Cooperators

- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
- Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
- Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services
- U.S. Forest Service
- 59 Counties, 62 Townships, 31 Airports

survival. WS' beaver and dam removal efforts, including continued annual maintenance, have restored approximately 1200 miles of high quality trout streams to free flowing conditions which has enhanced the natural reproduction of the states native brook trout populations.

In 2004, WS removed beaver and dams from 18 lakes in northern Wisconsin to enhance the germination and growth of wild rice. Beaver dams on the outlet of these lakes create water levels too high for the wild rice to germinate in early summer and negatively impact the later growth stage. WS beaver and dam removal on these lakes has restored wild rice beds which has a positive impact on wildlife habitat and the recreational harvest of wild rice.

## Looking to the Future

The WS program has experienced an increased demand for assistance from the public and the state on a variety of issues. Three of these emerging issues for WS are requests for assistance with sandhill crane damage to crops, feral hog damage to agriculture and natural resources and double-crested cormorant damage to natural resources. Sandhill crane populations have steadily increased concurrent with increased reports of crop damage caused by cranes. Cranes also create a potential threat to human health and safety at airports. These large, slow-flying birds use runways as loafing and feeding areas. In 2004, WS received 58 calls about agricultural crop damage caused by cranes. An urgent need exists for WS to provide assistance to landowners, businesses, and municipalities on crane issues. Feral hogs appear to be gaining ground in Wisconsin with hogs currently being reported in 23 counties. Feral hog complaints from landowners have been increasing as has the concerns from state agencies over the expansion of feral hog populations. Nationwide, the population of double-crested cormorants has increased to levels that are destructive to natural resources, fisheries, aquaculture facilities, and other species. WS will continue to support cormorant research in 2005 to provide important information that will direct the future of cormorant management in Wisconsin.

## Wisconsin Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives funding from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, state, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators request assistance from WS to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

